

## BETWEEN HEGEL AND HEIDEGGER

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One of the central and most controversial themes of Heidegger's career has been the celebrated "de-construction of metaphysics." Yet despite the importance of this undertaking, it remains the source of much confusion and misinterpretation. There seem to be two reasons for the continuing confusion in the discussion of this central issue: the first problem is to be found in Heidegger's own often self-contradictory pronouncements on the issue of metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> The second source of confusion over the meaning of the Heideggerian project of the "de-construction of metaphysics" is that interpreters of this project too often attend only to Heidegger's claims about this project rather than examining the details of the actual execution of the project. Furthermore, in attempting to analyze this issue, many interpreters overlook the contradictions in Heidegger's remarks about metaphysics, thus finding an unjustified consistency in Heidegger's relation to metaphysics and the project to deconstruct it. This approach leads either to the view that Heidegger offers a new metaphysics or, more often than not, that Heidegger is the ultimate foe of metaphysics. My contention is that neither of these views reflects the deepest meaning of the project to deconstruct metaphysics, and that a careful examination of the details of this project offers new insights into Heideggerian thought.

We find the actual execution of the deconstruction of metaphysics in Heidegger's lifelong dialogue with his predecessors. Fortunately, it is not necessary to recapitulate each step of this extensive and complex dialogue in order to gain access to Heidegger's project, because in Heidegger's encounter with Hegel we find a moment of that dialogue which offers a unique access to this attempt to deconstruct metaphysics; for here we find Heidegger confronting the self-proclaimed "completer" of metaphysics. Indeed, Heidegger's critique of Hegel is perhaps the best paradigm of the effort to deconstruct metaphysics and, whatever the idiosyncracies of Heidegger's critique of Hegel, that critique provides a mirror which clearly reflects the true meaning and implications of the project to "de-construct metaphysics". In this paper, I intend to examine one phase of that critique and to indicate how Heidegger's critique of Hegel points to an inescapable ambiguity which, whatever Heidegger's claims to the contrary, belongs to the attempt to deconstruct metaphysics.

Before turning to the details of Heidegger's deconstruction of Hegelian thought, it is helpful to speak of the expectations raised by the confrontation between Hegel and Heidegger. A glance at the claims of both philosophers would lead one to expect an outright opposition between them. The reason for this judgment is quite simple: In Hegel, we find the ultimate representative of the position that thought not only can, but *must* think itself *absolutely*; that is, that thought can and must absolutely come to think itself freed from anything that is unthought. According to Hegel, the path to this absolute *self-identity* and transparency of thought thinking itself is the path of *dialectic*. Heidegger, on the other hand, claims to have demonstrated why thought can *never* think itself absolutely; that is, that thought remains unavoidably shadowed by what is *unthought*. Indeed, for Heidegger, it is precisely this *self-concealing duplicity* and *opacity* of thought which it is the task of philosophy to think, and this he names the *ontological difference*. In short, Heidegger claims to demonstrate the impossibility of the (metaphysical) task which Hegel claims to complete. More precisely, the question which lies between Hegel and Heidegger is this: Is the thought of Heidegger radical enough to deconstruct the Absolute which Hegel claims to have achieved, or does even the Heideggerian project of the deconstruction of metaphysics fall within the metaphysical empire of the Hegelian Absolute?<sup>2</sup>

Heidegger's detailed confrontation with Hegel in the 1942 essay *Hegel's Concept of Experience* offers access to this difficult question. In order to interpret this essay in light of the larger question about the meaning of Heidegger's attempt to deconstruct metaphysics, it is necessary to pose the following questions:

- 1) How does Heidegger characterize the Hegelian concept of the Absolute?
- 2) How does Heidegger present Hegel's justification for the presence of the Absolute?
- 3) What is the basis of Heidegger's objection to Hegel's concept of the Absolute?

## I

The text of *Hegel's Concept of Experience* was occasioned by a 1942/43 seminar which Heidegger gave on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and this connection between Hegel and Aristotle builds the opening comment of the first section of the text. Heidegger remarks that when Hegel names the issue of philosophy as the actual knowledge of what truly is, Hegel echoes Aristotle's definition of metaphysics as the contemplation of what is present in its presence. However, Heidegger notes that between Aristotle and Hegel the determination of "what truly is" has turned out to be *Spirit*, the essence of which is *self-consciousness*. This new dimension of self-consciousness which was first opened up by Descartes is, according to Hegel's metaphor in the *VGP*, the *land* which proves to be the *ground* of thought itself. Hegel, says Heidegger, sees the task of metaphysics as to survey this ground and take full and complete possession of it. This, for Hegel, is done only insofar as thought achieves "the unconditioned [Absolute]"

self-certainty of knowing" (*HBE*, p. 118).<sup>3</sup> This Hegelian determination of the goal of metaphysics yields what Heidegger announces as the first determination of the Hegelian concept of the Absolute. It is "Spirit: that which is present (*Anwesende*) and by itself in the certainty of unconditional self-knowledge" (*HBE*, p. 118). In other words, Heidegger's first determination of the Hegelian Absolute is that it is the complete and transparent return to itself of Spirit.

It is worth nothing that, in his approach to Hegel, Heidegger begins by placing Hegel firmly within the tradition of metaphysics established by Aristotle and advanced by Descartes. But this location of Hegel as a successor to Descartes needs to be qualified, for Heidegger was quite aware that Hegel was equally an opponent of Descartes. For Descartes, knowledge is conceived as a *means* to grasp and know "what truly is", and so knowledge is regarded as *other* to that which truly is. This distinction between knowing and what is known is the reason Descartes conceives of truth as the *conformity* of knowing to the known. With regard to this Hegel makes clear that any separation between knowing and that which is known, i.e. what truly is as Absolute Spirit, would conceive the Absolute in a non-absolute manner, i.e. as having an *other*. Therefore, truth for Hegel is no longer conceived as the conformity of knowing to the known but as "knowing the self-certainty of self-consciousness in its unconditional essence and thoroughly to be in this knowledge as knowledge" (*HBE*, p. 121). Truth is now a matter of *certainty*.

Once truth is conceived of as the absolute self-certainty of knowing, the locus of truth is moved out of the realm of correspondence with objects and into the realm of knowing itself. In this way knowing begins to absolve itself from dependence upon its objects. This process by which knowing comes to be liberated (absolved) from dependence upon objects which are other to it is the process which results in the absolute character of knowing knowing itself. It is this very process, in its respective stages beginning with the futile certainty of sensuousness and passing through sense perception to understanding into the unconditioned self-knowing of reason, that it is the fundamental effort of the *Phenomenology* to present. Since Hegel speaks of this process as experience, we can understand why the title of Heidegger's essay indicates that it is to examine Hegel's concept of the dialectical process of the coming to be of Absolute Knowing.

This phrase "the coming to be" of the Absolute needs to be qualified. The Absolute can only "come to be" if it is already present in the beginning, i.e. the Absolute does not come to be by being achieved but by being revealed. This is so because, as Hegel demonstrated at the beginning of his *Logic*, to begin with any partial determination of what is, i.e. to begin with less than the Absolute itself, would require that the Absolute be assembled and this would require conceiving knowing as the means of assembling the Absolute — a position which Hegel has already criticized in Descartes. Consequently, for Hegel, any beginning which does not begin with the Absolute, i.e. any beginning which is partial with respect to the task of thought to think itself absolutely, is a beginning which is un-true, since "Truth is the whole" (*PG*, p. 21). Heidegger recognizes that this is so for Hegel and thus says: "the Absolute is already [from the beginning onward] in and for itself

with us of its own accord. This Being-with-us (*parousia*) is in itself already the way in which the light of truth, the Absolute itself, casts its light upon us" (HBE, p. 120). To be *parousia* belongs to the nature of the Hegelian Absolute. But how are we to understand what this means? And how does this fit together with the other traits of the Absolute to build Heidegger's conception of the Hegelian Absolute?

Thus far Heidegger has determined the Hegelian concept of the Absolute as being self-certain knowing which comes to be in the process of absolving itself from any dependence upon anything that is other to it. It appears, in Heidegger's words, as *parousia*; that is, as *ousia* which is "by us" (*par-*). This last characteristic of the Absolute means that the coming into full possession of itself of the Absolute occurs in and through "us", i.e. human beings: "This 'with us' has disclosed itself as the 'not without us'" (HBE, p. 188). Thus, Heidegger says:

The presentation is an essential way of presence (*parousia*). As such, i.e. as being present (*Anwesen*), it is the Being of beings that are as *subjects* .... The subjectness (*Subjektivität*) of the subject is the Being of the subject (*Subjektsein des Subjekts*), that is, of the subject-object relation. (HBE, p. 122)

The meaning of the subject through which the Absolute comes to presence is not the subject as ego (Fichte's position), but rather: "The subject has its being in the *representing* relation to the object" (HBE, p. 121). This simply means that the *parousia* of the Absolute is to be understood as founded in *representation*: "All the moments of Absoluteness have the character of representation. In them is the essence of the *parousia* of the Absolute" (HBE, p. 125).

The structure of representation as the manner of presentation, the *parousia*, of the Absolute can be explained as follows: Insofar as the relation between the subject and object renders the object present, this rendering present is a presentation of the object, but in rendering the object present as present to a subject it is re-presentation. In re-presentation, the subject returns to itself and becomes aware of itself as essential to the possibility of the presentation of any object whatsoever. This self-discovery which re-presentation reveals shows the essential relation between the subject and object as being *subjectness*. Heidegger's characterization of the presence of the Absolute as *parousia*, and his claim that subjectness is the essential character of the re-presentation upon which the *parousia* of the Absolute rests, together form an interpretation of the famous Hegelian notion that "substance is subject". According to Heidegger, the *parousia* of the Absolute must be seen as subjectness, which is thus the *hypo-keimenon* of what is. It is in this sense that subjectness is the *fundamentum*, the land or ground, of metaphysics as the effort to know what is.

A comment must be made about this pivotal concept of subjectness. In naming subjectness as the domain of the presence of the Absolute, Heidegger is not accusing Hegel of a naive subjectivism. Indeed Heidegger does not claim that Hegel identifies subjectness with the individual ego, but that Hegel attempts to demonstrate that the subject which is substance is the *universal and common ground*

which is ontologically prior to any individual subject; i.e. subjectness is the structural meaning of Spirit. Because individual subjects belong to subjectness, Hegel may claim that Spirit is knowable, and because Spirit has its "subjects" in the form of world historical individuals, it is never merely an abstract universal but always at work, i.e. it is the concrete universal.

This remark that the domain of the Absolute is Spirit, makes visible a further characteristic of the Absolute. In naming the domain of the Absolute "Spirit", Hegel sought to name the *unifying power* of the Absolute; that is, the inability of all otherness to resist the march of Spirit. This means that the Absolute is to be conceived as "the toil of enduring disunity (*Zerrissenheit*)" (*HBE*, p. 127). In other words, the Absolute is absolute as this final healing, or "*Aufhebung*", of all differences. The Absolute has its unifying power in being the identity from out of which, and back into which, all that truly is can be said to be. It is in this sense that the Absolute is the *home* of thought itself, and, for Hegel, it is the task of metaphysics to demonstrate this.

## II

We began our considerations of *HBE* by asking how it is that Heidegger characterizes the Hegelian concept of the Absolute, which is at the center of Heidegger's quarrel with Hegel. We could now present those traits in non-Heideggerian tabular form and say that the Hegelian Absolute is characterized by Heidegger as:

- 1) the *circle* of return to its own beginning which is complete, i.e. which no longer dissembles itself;
- 2) as such, it is the *self-certainty of self-knowledge*.
- 3) As this return to itself, the Absolute occurs via the process of *re-presentation*;
- 4) this means that the domain of the Absolute is *subjectness* and this in turn implies that
- 5) the Absolute though always present requires human beings to actualize it, i.e. it is present as *par-ousia*.
- 6) As *ousia* which reveals itself through us the Absolute is the *universal and common* ground of what truly is;
- 7) it is this by virtue of being the *unifying power of identity*, Spirit, which *reconciles all differences* such that nothing stands opposed to it.
- 8) These traits of the Absolute when taken together reveal it as the *home of thought* to which it is the task of philosophy to return knowingly.

Together these traits of the Absolute build the domain within which and as which the Absolute presences and makes itself known. The name which one gives this domain, whether it be Spirit, *Idee*, or *Vernunft* must first name the *inescapability of this domain*, and it must name this *domain as knowable*. Insofar as we are trapped in this domain of the Absolute, i.e. insofar as it is the home of thought

itself, we must recognize the Absolute as the true land of philosophy which Aristotle named as the task of metaphysics to contemplate and which Descartes first pointed to in a way which Aristotle had not known.

Our second question with regard to Heidegger's analysis of Hegel's concept of the Absolute was to ask how Heidegger presents Hegel's justification of the *parousia* of the Absolute. By now the answer is obvious: if the task of metaphysics as Hegel inherits it from Aristotle is ever to be fulfilled, then the Absolute, the home of thought which it is the task of philosophy to think, if it is to be absolute, can never be assembled from a non-absolute position, but need always be already present. Thus the idea of the Absolute itself, which these traits describe, must be its own justification since there is nothing "beyond" or "outside" of the Absolute to which thought could appeal. To give any justification for the Absolute other than the Absolute itself is impossible, for to do so would require that there be an other to the Absolute.

We are now in a position to ask the crucial question for Heidegger's critique of Hegel: What does Heidegger find objectionable about such a concept of the Absolute?

### III

*Heidegger's objection to the idea of the Absolute is that it not only overlooks, but is the highest concealment of the ontological difference.* But what is the meaning of this fundamental concept of the ontological difference, and how does the Absolute conceal it?

The notion of the ontological difference is the key concept lasting throughout Heidegger's career, we find it as early as the lectures of the 1920s and as late as the last seminars of the 1970s. Despite this, it remains one of the most difficult Heideggerian concepts to grasp. In *HBE* the idea of the ontological difference is first announced as the concealed ground of the essence of metaphysics. In other words, it is introduced as the as yet un-thought ground of that which the Hegelian concept of the Absolute presents as already grasped in thought. Heidegger thus intends to un-ground, or deconstruct, the idea of the Absolute by attempting to demonstrate that there is indeed a ground, or prior possibility, for the presence of the Absolute, and that this prior possibility is indeed other than the Absolute. What is more, Heidegger contends that this blindness to the ontological difference is not simply a matter of a deficiency in the Hegelian position, but "has its concealed ground in the essence of metaphysics itself" (*HBE*, p. 161). Here we see that Heidegger has conceived his quarrel with Hegel as being paradigmatic of his effort to deconstruct metaphysics.

In order to understand the way in which the ontological difference names the un-thought ground of metaphysics, it is necessary to recall the definition of the task of metaphysics as introduced by Aristotle: metaphysics is to inquire into beings as beings, *theorei to on hei on* (*Met*, Z, 1003a 21). This interrogation of

beings involves a going beyond beings to that which lets them be what they are, i.e. the basis of their being-ness which the Greeks named *ousia*. Thus, metaphysics becomes the effort to intelligibly gather together the whole of beings. As such, metaphysics is the effort to find the *logos* of *onta*, i.e. it is determined as essentially *ontology*. This, in turn, has traditionally required the gathering together of the beingness of beings, the *logos* of *ousia*, so that metaphysical ontology is essentially *ousiology*. It is precisely this effort to uncover and gather together the beingness of beings (*ousia*) which Heidegger is attempting to overcome. Consequently, the ontological difference must not be seen as an attempt to rename *ousia* and thereby surpass previous metaphysics, but as the thought with which Heidegger challenges the metaphysical prejudice that there is a substance either as beyond beings as the first and highest being (*theion*), or as the common denominator (*logos*) of all beings. In other words, Heidegger is attempting to deconstruct the *onto-theo-logical* way of conceiving what is, and he does this because it conceals the true issue for thought, i.e. the ontological difference. But what is the meaning of the ontological difference which is the call to thought?

There are three characteristics of the ontological difference which can clarify its meaning. First, it names the "difference of Being and beings" (*WG*, p. 132). Second, it is the as yet unthought origin of metaphysics, for "already in the essential beginning of metaphysics the difference which prevails in the ambiguity of the *on* remains unthought so that this "thoughtlessness" constitutes the essence of metaphysics" (*HBE*, p. 163). Third, it is to be explained as the ambiguity of the *on* which, according to Aristotle, is the matter for philosophy to think: "The ambiguity of the *on* names both what is present (*das Anwesende*) as well as (*das Anwesen*) presence itself" (*HBE*, p. 162). This last trait of the ontological difference will be our access to understanding the other two.

We must recall that philosophy was determined by Aristotle to be the contemplation of the *on hei on*, and though there have been modifications of this Aristotelian definition, the fundamental issue of philosophy has remained *to on*. Heidegger contends that in this issue of thought there hides an ambiguity which gives rise to metaphysics as ontotheology, and that ontotheology, as the effort to think the ground of what is as *ousia*, is itself founded upon this unthought ambiguity of "what is". Heidegger explains this first<sup>4</sup> by noting that the grammatical form of the word *on* indicates that it is a participle, and as such may be taken in either a nominative, substantive sense, or in a verbal, active sense. According to Heidegger this unthought ambiguity in that which metaphysics interrogates is not peculiar to Aristotle, nor is it a deficiency to be found in some metaphysicians; rather, it belongs to the essence of metaphysics itself, and indeed this ambiguity is to be found in those thinkers who prepare the way for metaphysics. Thus,

if we think, as will be necessary for thought, the essence of metaphysics in terms of the emergence of the duality of what is present and presence from out of the self-concealing ambiguity of the *on*, then the beginning of metaphysics coincides with the beginning of Western thought. (*HBE*, p. 162)

In other words, when the realm of thinking was opened up by Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides, they experienced this ambiguity in that which is to be thought, but they did not name it *as* this ambiguity; and by the time Aristotle formulated the task of thought, this twofold nature of the matter of thought had been forgotten.

This forgottenness of the inner difference, or ambiguity, in that which is to be thought is not, however, inconsequential. Rather, from it, Heidegger declares that the history of metaphysics has been the forgetfulness of Being, for "*the forgetfulness of Being is the forgetfulness of the difference of Being and beings*" (SA, p. 336). This means that Heidegger's career-long attempt to deconstruct metaphysics as a way of conceiving what is, is at the same time the effort to think what Heidegger claims is the unthought difference of Being and beings.

The meaning of this difference can be clarified by referring to Heidegger's presentation of the identity of Being and Nothing in *What Is Metaphysics?* Here we find that Heidegger opposes himself to a notion of nothing in which one conceives nothingness as negation because it poses all questions about what is according to the model of questions about the beingness of beings. The traditional way of thinking nothingness is incapable of thinking it as what it is in truth, for it can only think nothing as a something. This critique of the way of conceiving nothingness according to the model of thingliness is, by virtue of the identity of Being and Nothing, at the same time a critique of the way of conceiving Being according to the model of beingness, i.e. as *ousia*. Hence Heidegger's critique of metaphysics is that the difference between Being and beings is forgotten and that this occurs as the identification of the two in the notion of *ousia*. And thus Heidegger's objection to the Hegelian claim of the *par-ousia* of the Absolute is not that the Absolute requires us to reveal itself,<sup>5</sup> but that the Absolute is conceived as *ousia*, which Heidegger contends conceals the original inner ambiguity of that which it is the task of thought to think. Only by concealing the ontological *difference* which is the matter of thought could Hegel conceive the outcome of thought as absolute *identity*. Hegel's claim that the Absolute is the healing of all diremption in the identity that is the home of thought is, for Heidegger, the most extreme forgetfulness of the primordial difference which needs to be thought. For Heidegger, *thought knows itself as at home only in this homelessness*.

Such is, I believe, a fair presentation of Heidegger's *HBE* effort to deconstruct the completion of metaphysics as found in the Hegelian concept of the Absolute. We now need to ask how Hegel would reply to this critique. In order to do this we must pose the following questions to Hegel:

- 1) Is Heidegger's presentation of the concept of the Absolute just? Or does Hegel add anything to the justification of what Heidegger has termed the "*parousia*" of the Absolute?
- 2) Is there present in Hegel's thought the recognition of that which Heidegger has named the ontological difference? If not, then what would Hegel find objectionable about the ontological difference?



## IV

Since most of the traits of the Hegelian concept of the Absolute were developed out of Heidegger's careful exegesis of Hegelian texts, and since many of those traits are named as such by Hegel, we would not expect there to be much dispute over them. Indeed, such is the case, for of the eight characteristics of the Absolute which we discovered in Heidegger's analysis, only two — that the Absolute occurs in the manner of representation and therefore in the domain of subjectness — are disputable and so worthy of comment.

Hegel's critique of representation is quite well known. His critique of representation is that it is a way of thinking which has yet to overcome its attachment to beings. According to Hegel, *Verstand*, representational thought, is a way of conceiving what is which remains trapped on the level of *opposition* and *finitude* because, being unable to overcome a way of thinking which is predicated according to the model of things, *Verstand* is incapable of thinking the original infinite identity of Being and Nothing. It is precisely this finiteness of representational thought which Hegel attempts to overcome with the notion of the Absolute.

Hegel bases his contention that the Absolute is the overcoming of the representational attachment to beings on the claim that the true must be conceived "not as *substance*, but just as much as *subject*" (PG, p. 19), and that the subject is not to be conceived as another being, but as "pure, *simple negativity*" (PG, p. 20). Thus, Hegel's claim that the Absolute is not to be conceived as representational delivers us over to the second questionable Heideggerian characterization of the Absolute, i.e. that it occurs in the domain of subject-ness. Throughout his career, Hegel attempted to demonstrate the inadequacy of any philosophical position which does not overcome the narrow framework of the isolated (representing) subject as the locus of philosophical truth. This would seem to stand in blatant contradiction to Hegel's own claim that the Absolute must be viewed as subject as well as substance; however, we can resolve this contradiction once we recognize that there are two senses in which Hegel speaks of "subject". The sense of "subject" which Hegel criticizes is that of the subject as *isolated* ego; in other words, the subject which stands *opposed* to its objects which it represents. The other sense of the "subject", the one by which Hegel attempts to overcome the one-sidedness of a representational subject, is the subject conceived not as a something, but as *pure negativity*. Such a conception of the subject is not bound by existing determinations, or negations, in the manifold of things; rather, this "subject" as pure negativity has the function of negating all determinations, and so it is the overcoming of all differentiating determinations in the manifestation of their inner identity. The subject as negation is only this activity of negation, for insofar as it is a determinate being it must negate itself. This non-isolated (non-representational) sense of "subject" as that which unifies in the negation of all negation, i.e. which unifies dialectically, is what Hegel names Spirit. But how is it that this notion of the subject as Spirit escapes the one-sidedness of the subject conceived of as opposed to, and so dependent upon, its objects?

The answer is quite simple: Spirit is “there” prior to any particular, isolated subject, or object, for Spirit is the universal and common ground upon which and out of which all further determinations gain any significance whatsoever. This prior presence of Spirit does not, however, mean that Spirit exists independent of the manifold of what is. If that were the case, then Spirit would merely be a super-subject, or an enlargement of the individual subject. Instead, Spirit requires the active history of individual subjects without which it would be “the lifeless solitary” (*PG*, p. 564). In short, Spirit is the Hegelian name for the *parousia* of the Absolute. This means that the dispute over Heidegger’s characterization of the Absolute as representation and as remaining within the domain of subject-ness is rooted in the unresolved quarrel over what Heidegger has called the *parousia* of the Absolute. To get to the root of this quarrel we must ask our second question of Hegel: How would Hegel reply to this Heideggerian objection to the notion of the Absolute?

## V

There is one topic in which Hegel responds to these issues — the topic of *tragedy*.<sup>6</sup> In his analysis of tragedy, Hegel attempts not only to demonstrate the inadequacies of a position founded in the narrow sense of subjectivity and representation, but he also attempts to demonstrate how he overcomes such inadequacies. In his discussion of tragedy, we find the cornerstone of Hegel’s presentation of *the necessity of the reconciliation and unification of differences in an absolute identity*. In other words, the analysis of the concept of tragedy offers a clue to Hegel’s reply to Heidegger’s claim that the thought of the ontological difference is more original than the thought of the Absolute.

There are four extended examinations of the notion of tragedy in Hegel: two occur in the *PG*, one is to be found in the *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, and one in the essay *Naturrecht*.<sup>7</sup> All four of these presentations have one fundamental trait in common: each appears as the transition to a higher level of unification, i.e. each introduces the movement of the reconciliation of difference in a higher identity. In the *Aesthetik*, we find that there are three essential moments of this movement which tragedy describes: “first, [the appearance of] multiple ends ... second, the collision [of these multiple ends] ... third, the tragic reconciliation” (*VA*, III, p. 563). Together these three moments present tragedy as the gathering together of disparate elements into an inner tension which reveals the higher identity which unifies these elements into a whole, i.e. their truth.

The precondition for this movement of tragedy is the appearance of a multiplicity of ends each of which presents itself as true, i.e. as the universal end. But such a multiplicity of ends which stand in opposition is merely the conflict of opposites until the conflict is recognized in its truth, i.e. not merely as the conflict of opposites, but as the inevitable collision which results from an *inner* division. Thus the tragic conflict is the “inner diremption (*Zwiespalt*) in itself ... the being torn (*Zerrissenheit*) of the one and the same” (*VA*, III, p. 570). This tearing asunder

which is the root of the tragic collision of opposites produces the need for a reconciliation, for "to grasp the absolute connection of these opposites is the deepest task of metaphysics" (VPG, p. 41). More precisely, Hegel's contention is that unless this inner diremption is healed, subjectivity, representation, and the concomitant domination, i.e. the one-sidedness of *Verstand*, remains. In order to recognize how this division is overcome we must first recognize its source.

Tragedy only gains its true meaning in the *ineluctability of its source*. This is why the Greek notion of *moira* is the leading notion in understanding the meaning of tragedy. The destiny, or fate, which produces this collision and which *moira* names is inescapable because it is rooted in what is unthinkable as escapable, i.e. in *life* itself. From the time of his first published work, Hegel insists that "one factor of life is the necessary diremption (*Entzweiung*) which must eternally reconstruct itself against itself" (D, p. 21). The source of this diremption is thus to be understood as arising out of the philosophical key to comprehending life, i.e. Spirit. Indeed, the inevitability of the tragic collision is to be accounted for in the *work of the negative* which produces the struggle against itself that characterizes Spirit. Thus, in *Antigone*, which for Hegel is the paradigm of Greek tragedy,<sup>8</sup> we find that Spirit has objectified itself in the two extreme forms of the family and the state, which differ in their mutually incompatible ends and which necessarily collide since they are part of the same ethical realm. This is the difficulty that gives rise to the tragedy "which the Absolute eternally plays with itself, — that is, that it eternally gives birth to itself in objectivity" (NR, p. 495). In *Antigone* we find Spirit torn asunder and objectified into the two extreme powers which, though opposed and in conflict, *cannot exist separately* from each other for the state exists only through the continuation of the family, which in turn requires the state in order to be preserved. The essence of tragedy consists in this mutual conflict born of objectified interdependence, i.e. it consists in this *circular struggle*. But, as Hegel notes, this circular conflict, or inner diremption, which is the essential trait of tragedy, is not the full significance of tragedy. Rather, tragedy gains its true philosophical import in its completion, and this is the resolution of the conflict, *the reconciliation of the circular struggle*.

What was lacking in the situation of the collision was a consciousness of the *whole*. Conflict is the dominant character of the relation between the different ends only insofar as the division between the relation is held to be absolute. But once this division is recognized as a derivative abstraction of an original whole, then

the differences ... are not accidental characteristics. Rather, because of the unity [of the differences] from which alone discordance might have come, they are articulated groups of the unity permeated by its own life, unsundered spirits transparent to themselves ... that preserve, amidst their differences, the untarnished innocence and concord of their essential nature. (PG, p. 311)

In other words, the reconciliation of the tragic conflict first appears in the recognition of the essential inner structure which holds these conflicting opposites in

*tension*. This inner unity is, however, that which originally destined the tragic collision in its inescapability, and must now be revealed as the very synthesis of the opposites into a *harmony*. What then lets this inner structure be transformed from its original role as the source of tension and diremption into its role as the source of harmony and reconciliation?

We find the answer to this question in a rather surprising passage in the *PG*:

The reconciliation of the opposition with itself is the *Lethe* of the nether world in the form of death, – or, the *Lethe* of the upper world in the form of absolution ... from transgression .... Both are *forgetfulness*, the disappearance of the actuality and action of the powers of substance, of their component individualities, and of the power of the abstract thought of good and evil: for none of them for itself is the essence, rather this is *the tranquility of the whole in itself*. (*PG*, p. 516)

What is so startling about the path which is revealed as the path of reconciliation is that it is characterized as a forgetting in the form of either death or absolution. Both are ways in which the opposition is surmounted, both recognize that the inner tension of the tragic conflict cannot be surmounted so long as the opponents of the conflict hold stubbornly on to the mutually incompatible claim to be the universal, and recognizing this is the recognition of the *futility* of the attempt to escape the conflict or to overcome it by vanquishing one side of the conflict. The discovery of this tragic futility can produce death, as was the case with Hamlet, or absolution, but in either case the result is that each of the opponents lets go of, or forgets, its claim to be the universal. The inner tension and mutual interdependence of the two sides remain, but this tension is now free to establish itself as the common ground of the opponents and as such it is established as the higher identity which grounds the apparent differences. The reconciliation of the tragic conflict thus requires a radicalization of the difference, or the struggle, which is the very source of tragedy. Following his analysis of *Antigone*, Hegel gives this higher identity of reconciliation a name: Spirit (cf. *PG*, p. 313), and it is in this notion of Spirit that Hegel claims to have demonstrated the path which overcomes the one-sided opposition which characterizes the narrow sense of subjectivity and representation.

It is important to remember that the reconciliation of the tragic collision does not entail the complete escape or abolition of the inner difference of the conflict. Such escape or abolition is merely the return to the level of abstract identity, a return which the power of the negative will once again tear asunder. Rather, the resolution of the tragic conflict must preserve the inner difference because this difference is itself the source of the resultant harmony. This means that the concept of tragedy reveals Spirit as the process of a *conflictual unity*, and thus to fail to recognize Spirit is merely to fail to radicalize, or think deeply, the inner *difference*, or conflict, which lies at the root of this *conflictual unity*.

## VI

We are now in a position to respond to the third question which arose out of Heidegger's analysis of the Hegelian concept of the Absolute. We asked how Hegel would respond to Heidegger's objection that the notion of the Absolute is forgetful of the thought of the ontological difference, and if there is the presence of the thought of the ontological difference in Hegel.

To answer this question, we need to recall the essential character of the ontological difference, i.e. that it names an original ambiguity and inner tension which it is the task of thinking to follow. To truly follow this ambiguity means that the need to preserve this *difference as difference* must be recognized, and this means that every effort to locate and *identify* this original difference which is to be thought needs to be understood as simultaneously dis-locating this difference as difference. The truth of "what is" is therefore the struggle of revealing *and* concealing, of identity and difference; indeed, only insofar as this struggle is preserved does truth "happen". Thus Heidegger claims to overcome the one-sidedness of a metaphysics of subjectivity and representation by having thought the meaning of identity and difference more radically than it had yet been thought. For Hegel, too, there is an inner tension or difference which is a necessary moment of that which it is the task of thought to think. But, for Hegel, the import of this original diremption is that in it thought discovers the need to *overcome the difference* through the radicalization of the thought of the difference itself *in the more primordial identity*. The truth of the thought of "what is" is therefore the transparency of self-certainty in which Spirit, i.e. "what truly is", *reveals* itself; indeed, only insofar as this struggle is reconciled does the whole, i.e. truth, appear. Only thus, Hegel claims, is the one-sidedness of a metaphysics of subjectivity and representation overcome.

We must therefore answer that yes, Hegel does recognize something like the ontological difference in the diremption which the negative power of Spirit makes inescapable. But Hegel does not recognize this diremption as insurmountable; for Hegel, the true matter of thought is the identity, the *logos*, which the more radical thought of this reveals.

## VII

Essential to Heidegger's effort to de-construct metaphysics via the notion of the ontological difference is the demonstration that this notion has gone unthought throughout the history of metaphysics. However, a reappraisal of Heidegger's *HBE* critique of Hegel shows that it is possible to find in Hegel recognition of an original and ineluctable diremption in that which it is the task of thought to think. Consequently, it is not yet possible to grant that Heidegger succeeds in deconstructing the Hegelian concept of the Absolute. Furthermore, this reappraisal reveals that despite the expectation of an outright opposition between Hegel and Heidegger there is a very real proximity and entanglement between the project to "complete" metaphysics and the project to "deconstruct" it: both attempt to overcome the

metaphysics of subjectivity and representation via a radical analysis of what each names an original difference which the thought of what is faces. The thought of the Absolute and of the ontological difference represent different outcomes of the same thought.<sup>9</sup> One might object that, by focusing upon one instance of Heidegger's critique of Hegel, we have struck an idiosyncratic moment of the confrontation; however, in every stage of the confrontation between Hegel and Heidegger, we find the same entanglement and proximity.<sup>10</sup> This entanglement does not mean that the differences between Hegel and Heidegger have vanished, but it does mean that the attempt by either Hegel or Heidegger to fundamentally deny the position of the other entails, in significant respects, the denial of the very position from which that denial itself is made, and which is to be preserved and won by that very denial. Any further attempt to think the issue which lies between Hegel and Heidegger must begin by attempting to think the meaning and import of this entanglement of the two.

One consequence of the confrontation between Hegel and Heidegger is that they each become problematic to themselves in spite of themselves: For Hegel the question arises — does dialectic distort that which it attempts to reveal? For Heidegger the question is — why doesn't the thought of the ontological difference lend itself to its own dialectical *Aufhebung*?<sup>11</sup> In the end, the confrontation between Hegel and Heidegger raises far more questions than it answers; however, the discovery of the proximity and entanglement between the efforts to complete metaphysics and to deconstruct metaphysics does offer some significant clues about the meaning of the project to de-construct metaphysics.

The first insight which this result offers is this: The ambiguity in Heidegger's remarks about metaphysics is not accidental. Rather, they reflect the ambiguity which lets us find the thought of the ontological difference to be entangled with the thought of the Absolute. To deny this ambiguity in the project to deconstruct metaphysics is to deny that the thought of the ontological difference conceals as well as reveals, and to do that would be to allow that Heidegger alone is immune to the challenge which he offers to thought.

Second, this proximity between Hegel and Heidegger begins to disclose the impossibility of completing the inescapable task set for thought. Even the project to deconstruct the history of metaphysics needs to remember its present and future place in that history.

The recognition of this requires that we readjust our attitude toward our present place in the history of thought. We need to fight against the prejudice that we have a privileged view of that history from which we may complete or deconstruct that history. Both of these projects remain part and parcel of the fabric of that history; neither project can lay sole claim to be the pure overcoming of the past any more than either project can be accused of merely alienating or forgetting the task of thought. Such a readjustment of attitude means that we need to reevaluate our expectations about what has already happened in the previous history of thought.

In the end, philosophy, which from time to time seems to be deconstructed, destroyed, overcome, or completed, need remain, for it is love of that which, in the words of Heraclitus, "likes to hide."

## NOTES

1. Cf. *Holzwege*, p. 245: "Die Metaphysik ist eine Epoche der Geschichte des Seins selbst." And *Wegmarken*, p. 365: "Aber die Metaphysik bringt das Sein selbst nicht zur Sprache, weil sie das Sein nicht in seiner Wahrheit und die Wahrheit nicht als die Unverborgenheit und diese nicht in ihrem Wesen bedenkt."
2. This is the question which Gadamer raises, but does not answer, in his essay "Hegel und Heidegger" in *Hegels Dialektik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1971).
3. References to Heidegger's works are cited as follows: *HBE* for "Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung," *SA* for "Der Spruch des Anaximander," both in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt, 1972); and *WG* for "Vom Wesen des Grundes," in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt, 1978). References to Hegel's works are cited as follows: *PG* for *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952); *VPG* for *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971); *VA* for *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik* (Stuttgart: Frommanns Verlag, 1953); *D* for "Differenzschrift," *NR* for "Naturrecht," both in *Hegel Werke: Jenaer Schriften* (Stuttgart: Suhrkamp, 1970). If translations exist for the works cited, I have consulted them, although for purposes of consistency I have modified most of these translations. Where no translation exists, the translation here is my own.
4. Cf. Marx, *Heidegger und die Tradition* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1961), p. 132, where three manners of justification are noted.
5. That Heidegger would not object to this should be clear from the way *Sein und Zeit* presented *Sein* as requiring *Dasein*.
6. Heidegger would without doubt agree that the issue of tragedy is one way of conceiving the issue of the ontological difference. In the essay "Der Spruch des Anaximander," which is part of the *Holzwege* series of essays, and which opens with a reference to Hegel, who Heidegger calls "Der einzige Denker des Abendlandes, der die Geschichte des Denkens denkend erfahren hat ...." (*SA*, p. 298), we hear Heidegger say: "Dem Wesen des Tragischen kommen wir jedoch vermutlich auf die Spur, wenn wir es ... seine Wesensart, das Sein des Seienden, bedenken ...." (*SA*, p. 330).
7. It is not insignificant that all four of these passages deal with the concept of tragedy as it appears in the element of *Sittlichkeit*. The connection between Hegel's concept of tragedy and his social and political thought should not be overlooked.
8. It should be noted that for Heidegger, too, *Antigone* has a privileged place in considering Greek tragedy. Cf. the celebrated analysis of the chorus passage from *Antigone* in *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966), pp. 112–26.
9. Thus in his recently released *Vorlesung* on Hegel's *PG*, Heidegger says: "Unsere Auseinandersetzung ist auf diesen Kreuzweg ... gestellt, ein Kreuzweg, nicht ein Gegeneinanderhalten von zwei Standpunkten" (*Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 32, p. 92).
10. Heidegger's critique of Hegel begins in *SZ* with the notion of time, transforms itself in *Was ist Metaphysik?* into the critique of the notion of nothingness, appears in *Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* on the meaning of origin, in *Brief über den Humanismus* on the concept of work, in *Identität und Differenz* on identity and difference and on the thought of Heraclitus. Even such a collection of unique themes which Hegel and Heidegger share is an indication of the proximity of the thought of the two.
11. Gadamer cites a letter from Heidegger which offers insight on this point: commenting on Gadamer's claim that "Dialektik muss sich in Hermeneutik zurücknehmen," Heidegger says "Damit öffnet sich zum ersten Mal produktiv ein Weg zur Verwindung der Dialektik." *Das Erbe Hegels* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 90.